



Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide

Testimony for Reverend James L. Demus III
Senate Bill 720
February 22, 2008

My name is Reverend James L. Demus III and I am the founder and co-director for the Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide, otherwise known as MAADD. I thank the esteemed members of this Committee for the opportunity to testify on the negative impact that copper theft poses on consumers and why Michigan communities desperately need the State of Michigan to pass Senate Bill 720 into law.

MAADD is a 15,000 plus member next generation civil rights organization led by ministers designed to bridge the Digital Divide and promote personal and economic development in low income and minority communities across the country. Over the past two and a half years, our Michigan chapter has successfully promoted policies that have resulted in the availability of state-of-the-art broadband technologies in many low income areas across the state. We are proud of this accomplishment and will continue to work with government officials to continue this positive trend.

But MAADD is concerned that if action is not taken, the issue of copper theft could result in less broadband investment throughout the state, especially in Detroit where over 80% of the population is African American and the median annual household income is less than \$30,000. This is a community that cannot afford to lose opportunities for business and economic development as a result of the exorbitant increase in copper theft crimes over the past couple of years.

First, copper theft is not only a disincentive for businesses to locate in communities that are hardest hit by this crime, but it is also a strong deterrent for businesses to invest in bringing new broadband technologies to communities that need it most. Obviously, the prospect of spending millions of dollars to replace existing investment will deter new providers from entering the market. This means that over time there will be less competition and higher rates for consumers – and if businesses relocate because of the increase in crime, there will fewer jobs, more poverty and less opportunity for individuals to prosper. For providers that are already in the market, the fact that copper theft is causing them to spend millions of dollars to replace facilities means that there is potentially less money to invest in providing state-of-the-art broadband technologies to communities across the state that have yet to benefit. We cannot sit back and let this crime whittle away at our opportunity for progress!

Outside of eliminating potential economic development opportunities, copper theft creates a huge safety and security issue for the public. Thefts have caused power and 911 outages in entire neighborhoods, which can prove to be life threatening. Individuals need assurances that they can dial 911 in an emergency. Our elderly that are homebound

cannot be in a position where the air conditioning does not work when there is sweltering heat that poses a threat to their survival. Families struggling to provide food to young children cannot be put in a situation where their food spoils because the power to the refrigerator goes out. Automobile passengers cannot be put in a dangerous position because railroad signals and street lights have been knocked out. But these are precisely some of the things that Michigan consumers are experiencing as a result of copper theft.

To give you some examples, one of our members, Reverend Andre Spivey is the pastor of St. Paul AME Church in Detroit. Last year, vandals hit his church nine times in nine months, stripping copper tubing from his church's air conditioning units and ripping off electrical wires. In fact, the thefts shut down the church's cooling system for an entire week last August. To combat the problem, the church was forced to install a higher fence with wire roofing, sensors, a siren and security cameras – making a house of God into a fortress. Because of all of the thefts, Reverend Spivey is now worried that the church's insurance policy might be cancelled because of all of the claims. Other churches in the area have seen similar crimes and food pantries have had to quickly give away all of their food so that it would not spoil when thieves stole cooling units or the power went out due to electric cables being cut and harvested for scrap metal.

Senate Bill 720 will be a tool to help end this chaos that is occurring in our communities by making it difficult for criminals that engage in copper theft to sell their stolen goods to scrap metal dealers. By requiring scrap metal dealers to obtain a license and keep detailed records, it will be easier for law enforcement to track and capture these violators. Basically, if the government makes it harder for criminals to make money off of copper theft, there will be a reduction in these crimes.

Therefore, MAADD strongly encourages the Committee to promptly pass Senate Bill 720 into law. Our communities should be on the road to building prosperity, not allowing the criminals to lead us down a path that tears down opportunity, jeopardizes our livelihoods and threatens the safety and security of the public. It is time to take the incentive out of this senseless act and pass Senate Bill 720 into law.

Thank you for your time.